

An exploration of the lesbian label among health and kinesiology department academicians

Melanie Sartore, East Carolina University

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Abstract 151**

Despite numerous advances in the inclusion of women within the sport context (e.g., Acosta & Carpenter, 2006), sport and sport organizations continue to be rich in patriarchal traditions of heterosexual masculinity and male hegemony (Griffin, 1998; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Within intercollegiate athletics, for instance, Fink, Pastore, and Reimer (2001) identified White, Protestant, able-bodied, heterosexual males as the archetypal employee. As a result, individuals diverging from this template are often considered outsiders or of minority status, and, as a result, they may suffer differential work experiences relative to their majority counterparts (Fink et al.). Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in-groups (i.e., majority males) and out-groups (i.e., minority females) are contextually manifested on the basis of surface-level sex differences, negatively impacting attitudes toward and the experiences of females (i.e., out-group members) in sport and sport organizations (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2003). Further, the formation of this in-group/out-group dichotomy reinforces firmly established gender boundaries, the crossing of which often results in the formation of negative attitudes toward violators (Anderson, 2002, Griffin, 1998; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). As Krane (2001) noted, "females in sport know the social expectation of appearing feminine and the repercussions of not appearing feminine" (p. 121).

Gherardi and Poggio's (2001) wrote that "women who enter traditionally male organizations find themselves in a double-bind situation in which they are required to both assume male patterns of behavior and to preserve their distinctively feminine characteristics" (p. 257). Consistent with the backlash effect (see Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), women in this "double-bind situation" suffer social repercussions when presenting themselves counter to feminine ideals. Females in sport and sport organizations not only endure a traditionally masculine domain and societal backlash, but they must also contend with a third difficult situation; the historical gender-based stereotype that many women involved in sport, certain sports and job positions more so than others (e.g., Fallon, 2004; McKinney & McAndrew, 2000; Krane, 1997), are lesbians (Griffin, 1998). Simply put, whereas in organizations in general strong women may be regarded as unfriendly and perhaps even bitchy (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 2001), strong women in the sport context may also elicit the additional label of lesbian and subsequently be ascribed the associated negative stereotypes (Fallon, 2004; Krane, 2001; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Indeed, this represents a "triple-bind situation" with which women in sport and sport organizations must contend.

Faced with the abovementioned "triple-bind situation", women in sport often engage in identity management techniques with the purpose of thwarting, acknowledging, or challenging the lesbian label and stigma (e.g., Krane & Barber, 2005). Such strategies range from passing as the accepted norm to revealing one's true nature (Button, 2004; Clair et al., 2005; Griffin, 1991). From a self categorization (Turner et al., 1987) perspective, women, both lesbians and heterosexuals, often adopt prototypically feminine behaviors in an effort to avoid negative consequences (e.g., Blinde & Taub, 1992; Krane, 2001; Krane & Barber, 2003, 2005). Bound by social constraints, women "perform femininity" (Krane, 2001, p. 120), reproduce and maintain the feminine ideal, and unnecessarily allot cognitive, emotional, and physical resources to maintaining a feminine image, the effects of which may result in physical, psychological, and professional repercussions (Button, 2004; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Meyer, 2003).

The majority of research investigations into the meanings of and intersections between sex, gender, and sexual orientation within the institution of sport have focused on coaches, athletes, and physical education teachers (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Griffin, 1991, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Lenskyj, 1991; Woods & Harbeck, 1991). These ground-breaking inquiries have provided a great deal of knowledge about the gender-role expectations and heterosexualization of women in sport (Hargreaves, 1993; Krane, 2001; Rich, 1980; Sykes, 2001). Further, they have identified the lesbian label as a socially constructed, patriarchal control mechanism used to assert male dominance in sport (see Griffin, 1998). Despite possessing the same anomalous position "at the nexus of masculinist sport, gendered education, and pedagogies of the body" (Sykes, 2001, p. 13) as its counterpart, physical education, there exists a relative dearth of literature on this topic within college and university health and kinesiology academia. Thus, the purpose of this inquiry was to extend the understanding and implications of sex, gender, and sexual orientation through the voices and experiences of health and kinesiology department faculty members. More specifically, as gender and gender roles are unequivocally coupled with sexual orientation (see Hargreaves, 1993), we sought to identify the presence, impact, and potential consequences of the lesbian label within this setting and provide further insight into the pervasiveness of the lesbian label within sport's multifaceted context. An additional purpose of this inquiry was to assess the manner to which faculty members personally and professionally responded to, coped with, and managed the lesbian label and its associated stigma within their respective departments.

To examine these issues, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 faculty members, who identified as both male and

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female and lesbian and heterosexual. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, inductively analyzed, constantly compared, and coded into themes and sub-themes (Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 2004). Throughout this process, a number of procedures were implemented to establish trustworthiness and credibility (i.e., peer review, reflective journaling, memoing, and a negative case analysis; see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwant, 2001).

As articulated by these faculty members, the presence of a lesbian label and associated stigma within their respective health and kinesiology departments was identified. Thematically, the meaning of this label emerged in terms of sex roles, gender expectations, contextual and social norms, assumptions, and stereotypes, religious beliefs, politics, personal beliefs, inter- and intrapersonal conflict, and the necessity for equitable organizational rights between heterosexuals and homosexuals. While varied, such themes identify the lesbian label within health and kinesiology academia as primarily congruent to the label's meaning in other sport contexts (e.g., Blinde & Taub, 1992; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005).

In response to this label there was a perceived powerlessness against presumptions of lesbianism amongst females in sport and sport-related professions, a related necessity for self-protection concerning lesbian colleagues, and a notable influence on interpersonal and departmental relationships amongst faculty members. Thus, consistent with the social categorization framework as well as related literature, the lesbian label was identified within this previously unexamined sport-related context as reinforcing gender boundaries and gender prototypicality. Further, as work outcomes, departmental interactions, interpersonal relationships, and professional experiences were discussed in relation to the lesbian label, unnecessary cognitive and emotional resources were allocated to the lesbian label and stigma, the result of which may cause a detriment to professional duties.